



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **3 UNAUTHORIZED WORKERS ARRESTED AT IMPERIAL VALLEY MEAT PACKING COMPANY**

*Nation's bio-agriculture industry a key resource to protect*

BRAWLEY, Calif. –U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents today arrested three Mexican nationals working illegally at the Brawley Beef Plant who used fraudulent documents and false statements to gain employment at the plant.

The arrests inaugurate San Diego ICE's Operation Safe Cities in Imperial Valley, an ongoing post-9/11 worksite initiative that focuses on businesses with security sensitive sites and critical infrastructure facilities such as airports, defense installations and bio-agriculture industries.

In the 2004, more than 156 individuals who were unlawfully employed in San Diego have been arrested. Under federal law, employers who knowingly hire unauthorized workers face substantial fines, and in aggravated cases, possible criminal prosecutions.

During this morning's operation at the plant, ICE agents arrested Fernando Leal Cantor, 30, who re-entered the United States after being deported for a firearms violation in 1995. Cantor used an invalid immigration number to show the company he was authorized to work in the United States. Also arrested were Antonio Tirado Cruz, 34, who presented a fraudulent social security card, and Jose Francisco Caro, 31, who showed a counterfeit temporary Alien Registration Card. All three had rotated through jobs at the plant, including meatpacking, slaughtering, harvesting and packaging.

ICE agents in reviewed records for approximately 750 employees working at the plant.

The individuals arrested were specifically identified because their immigration status makes it unlawful for them to work in the United States. All three men will be deported to Mexico immediately.

An important goal of Operation Safe Cities is to initiate private/public partnerships to protect U.S. businesses against possible security breaches. Brawley Beef Plant fully cooperated in the investigation and is not facing criminal charges or civil penalties.

“Protecting the integrity of bio-agriculture industry in Imperial Valley is a crucial part of ICE’s interior enforcement strategy,” said Michael Unzueta, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in San Diego. “When a person uses fraud or false documents to obtain a job, they mask not only their true identities, but also their motives and their criminal history if they have one. In this way, they gained access to a protected resource.”

To aid employers with the screening process, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services operates the Basic Pilot Program, a Web-based system that businesses can use to verify the employment eligibility of newly hired workers. Nationwide there are more than 15,000 employer sites linked into the Basic Pilot Program. Interested employers are urged to call the agency’s toll-free number [888-464-4218] to obtain more information about the program.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.*